

# Charles Jencks 1939–2019

It's ironic that in the same year of the Bauhaus centenary, Charles Jencks should pass away. Jencks was a principal protagonist of the postmodern movement which challenged the legitimacy and singularity of mainstream modernism, as defined by Siegfried Giedion in *Space, Time and Architecture*.

In recent years he was best known for his work as trustee and co-founder of Maggie's Centres, an institution supporting cancer sufferers by providing secondary therapies alongside primary care institutions. These centres grew out of Charles Jencks and second wife Maggie Keswick's experience with cancer, the disease which claimed her life in 1995 and, finally, his own in London on 13 October this year.



Maggie's Centres were an opportunity for Jencks to provide patronage for contemporary architecture and offer a caring, supportive environment for sufferers, family and friends. Jencks established the centres predominantly in the United Kingdom and completed twenty centres in twenty years. He invited many architects and friends to design individual centres including Frank Gehry, Zaha Hadid, Rem Koolhaas, Richard Rogers, Kisho Kurokawa and Benedetta Tagliabue.

But it was his work as cultural and architectural theorist and historian which most strongly defined his position in the architectural milieu of his time. He was a protagonist, definer and high-profile promoter of postmodernism, a reactionary movement which emerged most significantly in the USA in the 1970s. The movement responded to the global proliferation of modernism which, by then, was referred to as late modernism. In fact, he has been referred to as the godfather of postmodernism – a title he would no doubt have greatly appreciated.

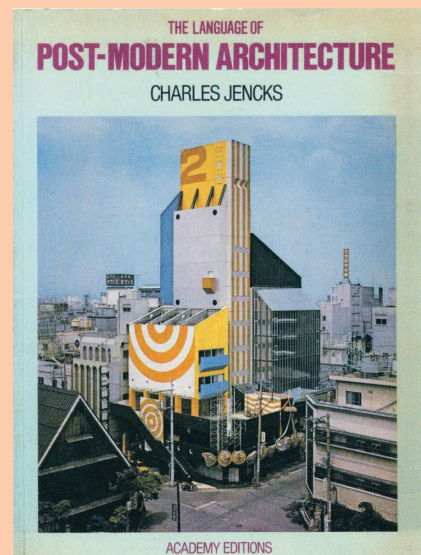
Having studied under Reyner Banham, Jencks acquired and relished the art of discussion and disagreement. He appeared in many television programs in Britain and the USA and wrote two films, one on Le Corbusier, the other on Frank Lloyd Wright and Michael Graves – strange bedfellows to say the least. Jencks was a prolific writer who contributed to many professional journals including *Architectural Forum*, *Architectural Review*, *Architectural Design*, *Domus*, *A&U*, *AD* and a host of other populist publications. But it was his two seminal books *Meaning in Architecture* in 1969 and *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* in 1977 that gave expression to his architectural theory and historical narrative.

In the controversial social and intellectual polemic which raged in the free world in the 70s and 80s, the importance of discourse was the hallmark of evolutionary change and Jencks was at the centre of it. Postmodernism challenged the central tenets of modernism – a rejection of 19th-century historicism and a blind obedience to functionalism, which was often pursued at the expense of the more visceral aspects of human experience. Predictably, postmodernism did not prevail and nor did the International Style. Instead, Kenneth Frampton's concept of critical

regionalism heralded the next generation of meaningful and authentic global architecture related to an architecture of its place and time.

By the 21st century, Jencks' stardom had passed but not before his forays into an esoteric brand of cosmogenic art, landscape architecture, architectural teaching and practice had reached its zenith. In 2015, Charles Jencks received the Sir John Soane's Museum Foundation honour in New York, the last major professional accolade of his career. The London terrace house he created with collaborators Terry Farrell, Piers Gough and others was a container for a collection of artefacts, furniture and artworks; the house was Grade 1 listed by Historic England last year. Plans are now underway for its conversion to an architectural museum called the Cosmic Home. Such is the legacy of Charles Jencks.

Ed Lippmann is the founder and principal of Lippmann Partnership.



A cover of one of Charles Jencks' seminal texts